

Fall 2001

The 1659 Dutch fort on Pilottown Road in Lewes: Zwaanendael map re-evaluated

Marshall Joseph Becker

West Chester University of Pennsylvania, mbecker@wcupa.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/anthrosoc_facpub



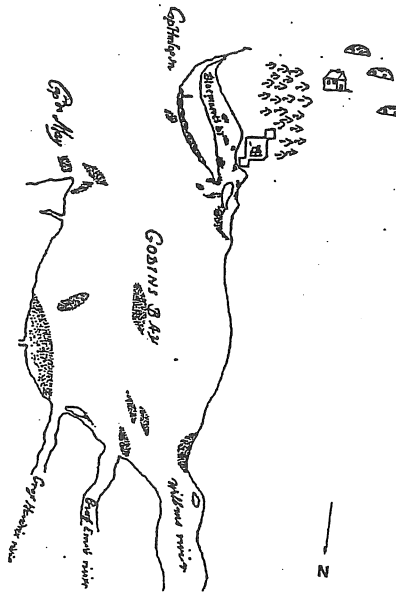
Part of the [Archaeological Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Becker, M. J. (2001). The 1659 Dutch fort on Pilottown Road in Lewes: Zwaanendael map re-evaluated. *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of Delaware*, 38, new series, 1-5. Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/anthrosoc_facpub/68

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of the Sciences & Mathematics at Digital Commons @ West Chester University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Anthropology & Sociology by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ West Chester University. For more information, please contact wccressler@wcupa.edu.

Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of Delaware



A new date for an old map



ISSN 0003-8067

Number thirty-eight, new series

Fall 2001

Contents

The 1659 Dutch fort on Pilottown Road in Lewes:
Zwaanendael map re-evaluated

Marshall Joseph Becker 1-5

The 1659 Dutch fort on Pilottown Road in Lewes: Zwaanendael map re-evaluated

Marshall Joseph Becker
West Chester University

By 1629 Dutch explorers and merchants had established a network of trading stations on the shores of North America stretching from Maine down to Delaware Bay. Several important purchases of land in the Delaware Bay region provided various Dutch merchants with tracts on which to build fortified trading stations. The earliest of these European outposts in the Delaware Valley had been established in 1623 on what is now Burlington Island, New Jersey (see Veit and Bello 1999).

On 1 June 1629 Samuel Godyn, acting for the (Dutch) West India Company, purchased a tract of land in present Delaware from the "Ciconicins" (Kent 1979: 5-9). In 1630 the Dutch purchased land in southern New Jersey (Becker 1998). The Dutch maintained exclusive control of trade throughout the region until Sweden in 1638 established a trading post (Becker 1999) on the present site of Wilmington, Delaware.

Principal data relating to the whaling station in Ciconicin territory were gathered by Brodhead (1853, I: 206; also 1859, I: 206). Within a year after the purchase of this tract from the Ciconicin, another expedition to Delaware Bay left Holland to establish an outpost there. The goal of the expedition of 1630 was to set up a whaling station in the New World. Whaling equipment was loaded onto two ships along with agricultural implements and a small herd of cattle. Self-sufficiency in food was a standard procedure for military as well as economic outposts of that period.

The two expedition ships of 1630 were the 18-gun *Walvis* (Whale) and a small yacht. They sailed in mid-December of 1630. The yacht was captured by privateers early in the journey (Brodhead 1859, I: 205). *Walvis* continued along the planned route to the Tortugas, then turned north toward the South (Delaware) River, where it arrived in April of 1631.

The party sailed only a few miles into the bay itself where they intended to establish

the whaling station. The location of this outpost was described as follows:

"within Cape Carnelius, Heyes came to the Horekill, 'a fine navigable stream,' filled with Islands, abounding in good oysters, and bordered by land of 'exhuberant fertility.'"

(Brodhead 1853, I: 206).

Gillis Hossett was in charge of this expedition:

"... Dutch title [to this tract], by discovery, purchase, and occupation, was solemnly asserted by the erection of a pillar, surmounted by a piece of tin, on which were emblazoned the arms of Holland" [the location being] "near the present town of Lewiston [Lewes]."

Brodhead (1853, I: 206)

Brodhead (1853) also offers an extensive footnote referencing the original documents and secondary sources from which his summary is derived. Included are citations from various works including David Petersz. de Vries's "Korte Verhael [Historiael] van Nieuw Nederland...Vertoogh van N. N. (as cited in *the Holland Documents* iv, 71 and in ii; *New-York Historical Society Collection*, volume 2). The "purchase" of the land on which the 1631 station was built, described by surviving documents presented and reviewed by Kent (1979: 5-9).

In 1631 expedition members are said to have erected a significant structure of brick, probably from ballast bricks carried by the relatively empty ship (Becker 1977). This may be the same building described as "a brick house" that was to serve as part of the defensive system. Specifically noted is "a brick house" to serve as a fort as well as a residence, was soon erected and enclosed with palisades." Most colonial constructions of that time were of logs or frame.

Dutch West India Company fort

In 1659, the West India Company built a fort at a known location on Pilottown Road, in what is now Lewes.

This fort was far to the south of the 7 June 1659 additional purchase of land made by the Dutch from the native group then living around Bombay Hook (Kent 1979: 34-35). The native vendors were members of one of the southern Lenape bands. In 1659 the Dutch were

The Sussex Society of Archeology and History investigated a site in that area, believed to represent the 1631 fortifications. Architectural and archaeological findings from the excavation are described by Bonine (1956, 1964; cf. Peets 1952, Boyd 1938). The enclosure was a diamond-shaped "palisade," with two structures identified as bastions at the long ends.

The tract where the enclosure stood was identified by historical documents as the site of the West India Company fort of 1659 (Marine 1955; Thomas 1983).

Of note in the Lewes excavation is the lack of a palisade trench for a defensive work (Bonine 1964). Rails, or horizontal boards, evidently were hung on the posts with the result commonly known as a "post and rail" system. Excavation of the south "bastion" of the Lewes enclosure reveals that square holes were used to erect the posts. These posts were arranged roughly in the shape of a small diamond, extending from the end of a larger diamond. This small "bastion" measures about three to four meters on a side, being indicated now only by a series of discontinuous holes. This small "bastion" is at one end of the principal and larger "diamond" shaped enclosure which measures about 75 meters along each edge. The long intervals between the holes into which the posts were set suggest that the enclosure at Lewes was a post and rail type, probably faced with boards attached to the posts.

1. Bonine (1956: 13) notes that the version of the map that he offers ("Courtesy Algemeen Rijksarchief [sic], The Hague, Holland") has "No. 17" written in the lower left corner of the sheet. Bonine suggests that this map may have been part of a numbered folio.

2

an American who did not know Dutch. All of this suggests that the Peets copy may postdate the 1655 publication of the book. This does not provide a date for the original version of the map held in the archives in Holland. The copy of the map also could indicate that the original version was not available or known to de Vries, or that it simply was not used in the writing of this book after 1644.

2. The location of the fort on the map is indicated as being on "Bloemaerts Kil" (the Whorekil), near where Lewes now stands. The Whorekil generally is described in early documents as the location of the Ciconicin "village" in 1629, at the time of their sale of a tract of land (Kent 1979; Peets 1952; Bonine 1956, 1964). The 1631 Dutch whaling station is more likely to have been located some distance from the Ciconicin "village," but along the shore of Delaware Bay.

3. The "fine big house" (Peets 1952) seen on this map located beyond the woods, to the southwest of the fort, is not likely to represent an early trading station of ca. 1631. More probably it reflects a later (post-1650) colonial farmhouse. It is more likely to represent the settlement known as the Whorekill Town, probably the same as the Townsend Site (Omwake and Stewart 1963) and possibly the 1663 Plockhoy settlement of Dutch pietists.

4. Perhaps the most important evidence for a later date for the anonymous map is the appearance of four native structures situated beyond the outlying colonial house (the Peets 1952 version depicts only three). The Ciconicin village noted in several early documents relating to the 1631 Swanendael settlement is nowhere indicated on this map, suggesting that the fort depicted in the drawing is not near a Ciconicin village.

Dunn (2002: 5, 11, fig. 12) discusses the early Godin's Bay map in her paper from a recent conference on native built "longhouses." While Dunn accepts the popular 1630 date that some assign to this map, she also addresses the general problem of "longhouses" as they are depicted on 17th-century maps, and whether they were real or imagined. The possibility must be considered that these depictions of native structure are space fillers, like many map cartoons, or meant to indicate that the setting is on the native frontier.

On the other hand, the centralized Ciconicin chiefdom was in decline by 1659. No archaeological evidence of a contact period

native habitation area in the Ciconicin zone of Delaware has ever been identified.

5. The archaeology of the enclosure found at Lewes, presumably the same location that is indicated by the map (Bonine 1956), suggests hewn and squared posts were used to hang planks or rails. This suggests a leisurely rate of construction, probably at a later date than the original Swanendael whaling station. Furthermore, the excavations did not locate a brick structure in association, while the documents clearly indicate that a brick structure had been part of the 1631 outpost.

Conclusion

Taken together these various details suggest that the fort depicted on the original map, and the copy, was built at a time later than the Swanendael whaling station; or after 1631.

Dutch fortifications in the New World remain poorly known from either the archaeological or the documentary records. The diamond shaped enclosure at Lewes is among the better known of these early defensive works, but there is an unfortunate lack of information surviving from the original excavations. The dates of the ceramics recovered, or of the more important white clay smoking pipes from this excavation, would provide valuable clues to specific period of use and occupation. In the absence of this information we must turn to other bits of evidence to assign a possible date, and to fit this piece of the puzzle into its correct historical position.

Acknowledgements

Since thanks are due the many people who provided encouragement and information relating to the writing of this manuscript. Special thanks are due Ned Heite for his useful advice and considerable editorial efforts in the production of this version of the text. This paper was written while the author was a Research fellow in Anthropology at The University of Pennsylvania. Any errors of presentation or interpretation are solely the responsibility of the author.

References

Bancroft, George

1883-85 *History of the United States of America* (6 volumes, author's last revision). New York: D. Appleton and Company. LAC 22534-22537.

- Becker, Marshall Joseph
- 1977 "Swedish" Colonial Yellow Bricks: Notes on their uses and possible origins in 17th Century America. *Historical Archaeology* 11: 112-118.
- 1999 Mehoxoy of the Cohansey Band of South Jersey Indians: His Life as a Reflection of Symbiotic Relations with Colonists in Southern New Jersey and the Lower Counties of Pennsylvania. *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of New Jersey* 53: 40-68.
- 1999 Excavations at the Printzhof (36DE3), The Only Documented Late 17th Century Swedish Site in the Delaware Valley. *Journal of Middle Atlantic Archaeology* 15: 77-94.
- Bonine, Chesleigh A.
- 1956 Archaeological Investigation of the Dutch Swanendael Settlement Under DeVries, 1631-1632. *The Archeologist* 8 (3): 1-17.
- 1964 The South Bastion of the De Vries Palisade of 1631 (7S-D-11): Lewes, Delaware, 1964. *The Archeologist* 16 (2): 1, 13-19.
- Boyd, Julian P. (compiler)
- 1938 *A Catalogue of Books and Materials Relating to Swedish Colonization on the Delaware River*. Philadelphia: Gilpin Library of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
- Brodhead, John Romeyn
- 1853 *History of the State of New York: First Period 1609-1664* (2 Volumes). First edition. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- De Vries, David Pietersz.
- 1912 From the "Korte Historiae ende Journaels Aenteyckeninge" (1630-1633, 1643). Pages 7-29 of, *Narratives of Early Pennsylvania West New Jersey and Delaware*, edited by Albert Cook Myers. New York: Charles Scribners Sons.
- Dunn, Shirley W.
- 2002 The Longhouses of Seventeenth-Century Maps: Real or Imagined. *The Bulletin: Journal of the New York State Archaeological Association* 118: 2-18.
- Ferris, Benjamin
- 1846 *A history of the original settlement on the Delaware, from its discovery by Hudson to the colonization under William Penn. To which is added ... Swedish settlers, and a history of Wilmington*. Wilmington, Delaware: Wilson & Heald. LAC 16195.
- Hazard, Samuel
- 1850 *Annals of Pennsylvania*. Reissued 1970, by Kennikat Press, Port Washington, New York.
- Heite, Edward F. and Louise B. Heite
- 1986 Delaware Valley fortified colonies: New Netherlands and New Sweden. Synopsis of a Presentation (October). Privately printed (2 pp).
- Kent, Donald H. (editor)
- 1979 Early American Indian Documents: Treaties and Laws, 1607-1789. Volume I: Pennsylvania and Delaware Treaties, 1629-1737. Washington, DC: University Publications of America.
- Marine, David
- 1955 Duke of York Patents on Pilot Town Road. *The Archeologist* 7 (2):1-4.
- Moulton, Joseph White (see under Yates, John V. N. and Joseph White Moulton)
- Omwake, H. Geiger, and T. D. Stewart
- 1963 The Townsend Site Near Lewes, Delaware. *The Archeologist* 15 (1).
- O'Callaghan, E. B. (editor)
- 1858 *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New-York*, Volume I. Albany: Weed, Parsons.

Peets, Orville H.

- 1952 [Investigations at Lewes, Delaware].
The Archeolog 4 (2): two
unnumbered pages.

Thomas, Ronald A.

- 1983 An archaeological study of a
Proposed Research Park near
Lewes, Sussex County, Delaware.
The Archeolog 34 (1):1-41.

Veit, Richard and Charles A. Bello

- 1999 "A Unique and Valuable Historical
and Indian Collection": Charles
Conrad Abbott Explores a 17th-
Century Dutch Trading Post in the
Delaware Valley. *Journal of Middle
Atlantic Archaeology* 15: 95-123.

Vries, see de Vries

Yates, John V. N. and Joseph White Moulton

- 1824-26 *History of the State of New-York,
including its aboriginal and colonial
annals* (1 volume in two). New
York: A. T. Goodrich. LAC 15772.

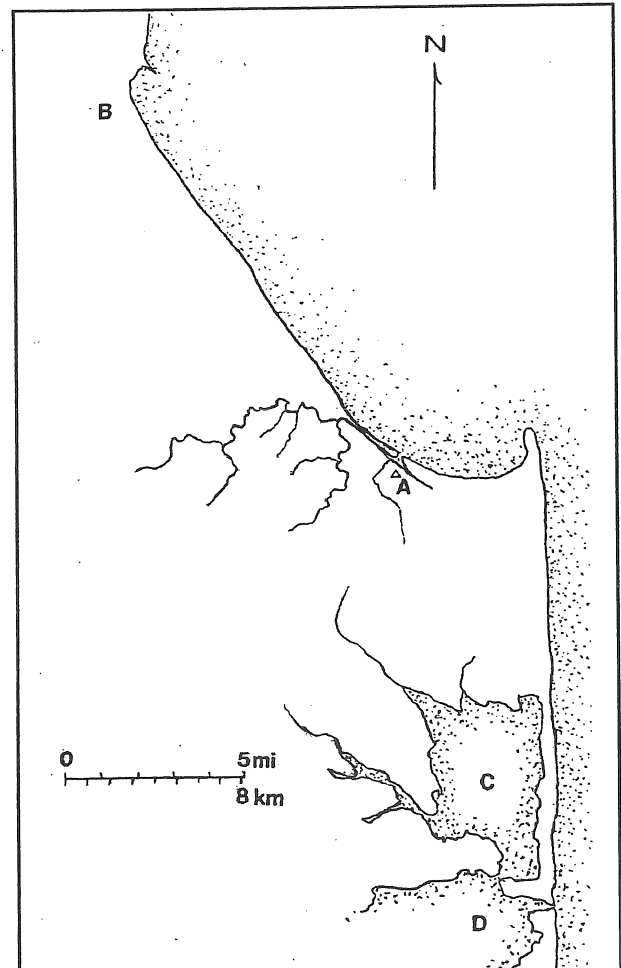


Figure 2: The central area of Modern Delaware State.

A. The Lewes area, west of Cape Henlopen, with a triangle marking the area suspected to be the location of the 1659 Fort.

B. The area of modern Slaughter Beach, a possible location of the 1631 Swanendael settlement.

C. Rehoboth Bay, the southern limits of the territory of the Ciconicin.

D. Indian River Bay, the shared resource zone separating the Ciconicin from their southern neighbors, who may have been the Assateague, later called the Indian River Indians, among the ancestors of the present Nanticoke community.